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## Scours in Pigs

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# Scours

By Gordon McNeilly, Extension Veterinarian and Livestock Health Specialist, and G. S. Harshfield, Professor of Veterinary Science

Scouring in little pigs is a problem encountered by all swine producers.

There are many different causes of scouring: bacteria, viruses, over feeding, poisons, poor feed, lack of immunity, parasites, and others. Any treatment of scours must be aimed at the factor which is causing them. This fact sheet will discuss the role of immunity in preventing scours.

## Lack of Adequate Immunity at Farrowing Time

At birth, little pigs do not have immunity to any of the infectious agents commonly affecting swine. If the sow is in good physical condition, she will provide a considerable amount of colostrum milk for the little pigs. The sow produces additional antibodies of many different types and includes them in the so called "colostrum" or first milk. There will be as many different types of antibodies as there were infections encountered by the mother in her lifetime. Since these antibodies act as an army to fight infection, it is very important that little pigs receive an adequate supply of colostrum milk.

## Production of Antibodies by Sows

The sow must have a balanced ration if she is expected to maintain an adequate antibody level to protect her own life and at the same time pass on to her offspring enough antibodies to protect them until they can produce their own antibodies.

The sow must be free of parasites and diseases. If the mother is fighting a "war" against infection and parasites, she is unable to supply adequate amounts of antibodies for her offspring.

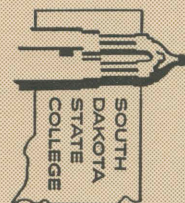
## Farrowing Time

Farrowing time is one of the critical times in the life of the small pig. The pig at birth has no protection against various infections and parasites waiting to destroy him. The **first line of defense** is the colostrum milk of the sow. This in adequate amounts will protect the little pig for 2-3 weeks. The amount of protection will vary with the sow and the number of pigs. Some sows will adequately protect ten to fourteen pigs while others may produce enough colostrum to protect only seven to nine pigs.

The **second line of defense** is the sanitation program. This includes the cleaning and disinfection of the farrowing house. It must, also, include adequate protection from infectious agents commonly found in the mother's stools. Many of the bacteria found in the

# Scours in Pigs

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stools will cause scours if they enter the digestive system of the small pig at this age.

## Shortage of Milk

The next critical period in the life of the baby pig varies with the milk producing ability of the sow. The little pigs normally grow rapidly and in a short time outgrow the mother's food supply. At this point, generally 2-3 weeks after farrowing, the owner may notice that the pigs do not appear satisfied after nursing and that they begin to search for more food. Many times the little pigs are not too careful where they search. Scours will often develop from the large numbers of bacteria picked up by the little pigs in search of more food. Keep in mind that the antibodies from the colostrum milk are probably used up at this time.

Giving the litter extra food at this time will often help prevent scours. Milk or milk replacers seem to quickly attract these small pigs. Dry feeds which are highly palatable and easily digested will also be accepted. The extra food should be timed to supplement the milk of the mother at that point when the pigs begin looking for more food. **Any management practice aimed at preventing bacteria from entering the digestive system will help reduce scours.**

If little pigs continue to have adequate supplies of suitable food and if the intake of bacteria into the digestive system can be reduced to a minimum level, scours caused by bacterial agents will be reduced.

Prevention of scours increases growth rate, feed efficiency, and profits.

For further information on ways to prevent scours consult your local veterinarian.